Random Encounters
What's Bugging You?
By Robert Wiese

Vermin Druids and Their Companions

Some druids favor animals, and others favor plants. A very few favor insects, or vermin, or would if they could. Using these rules, they can.

Druids who favor insects have a more difficult time than druids favoring animals, because vermin are very different from animals. An animal has some intelligence, though slight, and can understand what the druid wants. It can, to some extent, strategize and solve problems. Insects understand need, and that is about it: need for food, need for safety, need for shelter from the elements, need to escape predators, need to protect offspring (in some cases). Animals understand these too, but animals can move beyond basic needs in their intellectual capability. Vermin cannot be handled, or trained, or even spoken to. Because of this, the relationship between a druid and her vermin companion is different than it would be with an animal.

A druid can select a vermin companion from the following table. She must be of the indicated level, and the amount in parentheses is subtracted from the druid's level to determine the companion's special abilities.

1st Level or Higher (Level -0)

- Giant Ant, Worker
- Giant Bee
- Giant Fire Beetle
- Monstrous Centipede, Large
- Monstrous Scorpion, Medium
- Monstrous Spider, Medium

4th Level or Higher (Level -3)

- Giant Ant, Soldier
- Giant Bombardier Beetle
- Monstrous Centipede, Huge
- Monstrous Spider, Large

7th Level or Higher (Level -6)

- Centipede Swarm *
- Giant Praying Mantis
- Giant Stag Beetle
- Giant Wasp

- Locust Swarm *
- Monstrous Scorpion, Large

10th Level or Higher (Level -9)

- Monstrous Centipede, Gargantuan
- Monstrous Spider, Huge

13th Level or Higher (Level -12)

- Monstrous Scorpion, Huge
- Monstrous Spider, Gargantuan

16th Level or Higher (Level -15)

- Monstrous Centipede, Colossal
- Monstrous Scorpion, Gargantuan

*Swarms might be very unusual when thought of as a companion, but the image of a druid pointing and a mass of small creatures moving to attack is too good not to include. A swarm acts as a single creature for purposes of special abilities described below.

Druid vermin companions are treated as magical beasts (enhanced vermin) for purposes of effects that depend on its type (though it retains its vermin type and traits, vermin Hit Dice, base attack bonus, saves, skill points, and feats). However, most useful spells that affect animals still do not affect vermin companions. Vermin companions are superior to normal vermin, and they have special abilities that depend on druid level, just as animal companions do.

Class Level	Bonus HD	Natural Armor Adj.	Str/Dex Adj.	Bonus Tricks	Special
1st-2nd	+0	+0	+0	0	Empathic link, share spells
3rd-5th	+2	+2	+1	0	Evasion
6th-8th	+4	+4	+2	2	Skills, feats
9th-11th	+6	+6	+3	3	Multiattack
12th-14th	+8	+8	+4	4	
15th-17th	+10	+10	+5	5	Improved evasion
18th-20th	+12	+12	+6	6	

The Bonus Hit Dice, Natural Armor Adjustment, and Str/Dex Adjustment work exactly as for animal companions.

Empathic Link (Su): Because vermin cannot normally learn tricks, a druid must establish an empathic link with a vermin companion. The range of this empathic link is line of sight. The link allows the druid and vermin to communicate needs back and forth, and it can be activated and suppressed at will by the druid.

For game purposes, communication of needs is equivalent to directing the vermin to perform any of the following tricks: come, down, heel, or attack. Using *empathic link* to communicate with a vermin companion is a move action.

Without any guidance, a vermin companion follows the druid around and reacts normally to stimuli. For example, if it is hungry, it tries to eat anything it normally considers food, except the druid and her companions. The vermin generally considers people and other creatures closely associated with the druid as part of its colony. It runs from predators, and it takes shelter from inclement weather. It sleeps when the druid does. The druid can use her empathic link to overcome these normal reactions as described above. The vermin always attacks any creatures that have attacked the druid or her companions, without need for commanding -- even when the foe includes aberrations and outsiders. However, it flees from undead and oozes (even if given the order to attack), though it stays within sight of the druid if possible. Once the undead or ooze leaves the scene (or is destroyed), the vermin companion can be recalled via the empathic link (by issuing the command to come). It will not attack constructs because it cannot register a construct as a possible food source (even if given the order to attack). It also does not attack incorporeal creatures, undead or not. It must be called off via empathic link once it has begun fighting.

Share Spells (Ex): The druid can share spells with a vermin companion in the same way that she can share spells with an animal companion.

Evasion (Ex): If a vermin companion is subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex save for half damage, it takes no damage if it makes a successful Reflex saving throw.
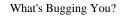
Skills (Ex): Continued exposure to the druid enlarges the vermin companion's capabilities. When the druid reaches 6th level, the vermin companion gains skill points as if it had an Intelligence of 1, and it gains quadruple that for its first Hit Die. These points must be spent on Balance, Climb, Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Spot, Survival, or Swim. Swarm companions do not gain skills.

Feats (Ex): Vermin companions that gain skill points also gain feats. Select one feat plus one feat per three Hit Dice for the companion. These may be selected from the *Player's Handbook* and the *Monster Manual*. The vermin must meet all prerequisites for the feats selected. The feats cannot require intelligence to use or give skill check bonuses for skills not listed under "Skills" above. The vermin cannot take the Track feat. Swarm companions do not gain feats.

Bonus Tricks (Ex): When the druid reaches 6th level, the vermin companion can learn two tricks, as per the normal rules under Handle Animal for teaching an animal tricks. This includes teaching it to attack unnatural creatures, including corporeal undead and oozes. It takes a separate trick slot to teach a vermin companion to attack constructs. It cannot be trained to attack incorporeal creatures. It gains additional tricks as the druid increases in level. It cannot gain the Track trick. A druid may have her vermin companion perform tricks it knows as a free action. A vermin companion can be pushed as a full-round action to perform a forced march or hustle, but that is all.

Multiattack (Ex): The vermin companion gains Multiattack as a bonus feat if it has three or more natural attacks. If it does not have three or more natural attacks, it instead gains a secondary attack with its primary natural weapon at a -5 penalty.

Improved Evasion (Ex): If a vermin companion is subjected to an attack that normally allows a Reflex save for half damage, it takes no damage if it makes a successful Reflex saving throw and half damage if the

saving throw fails.

[Return to Main Page](#)

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd